



THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY  
WASHINGTON DC 20350-1000

JUN 10 2022

From: Secretary of the Navy  
To: CAPT John Kurtz, USN

Subj: SECRETARIAL LETTER OF CENSURE

Ref: (a) RDML (b) (6) [REDACTED], USN ltr 5830 of 4 Jun 21  
(b) U.S. Navy Regulations, 1990  
(c) JAGMAN 0114a

1. Reference (a) is the investigation into the July 30, 2020, fatal Assault Amphibious Vehicle (AAV) sinking that resulted in the tragic deaths of eight Marines and one Sailor. The fatal sinking occurred while the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit and the MAKIN ISLAND Amphibious Ready Group, which included the USS SOMERSET (LPD 25), were conducting integrated training off the coast of Southern California. On the day of the tragedy, you were serving as Commanding Officer, USS SOMERSET (LPD 25).
2. Per reference (b), the responsibility of the commanding officer for his or her command is absolute, except when relieved from responsibility by competent authority. When you accepted command, you accepted it with the understanding that it included responsibility for properly managing, preparing and training the crew. Although the investigation did not establish that any of USS SOMERSET's actions or inactions caused the sinking, it ultimately found that you failed in your duties to oversee AAV operations as the primary control officer. Specifically, you failed to exercise positive control over the AAVs during their shore-to-ship transit. Additionally, some of the AAV associated briefings did not include a robust discussion of the actual dangers involved in AAV operations (e.g., vessels in distress and safety boats). As a result, your crew was poorly informed of the risks and measures required for safe AAV operations. Lastly, there was confusion regarding how safety boat requirements would be met, and you did not seek to verify those requirements were met once you became aware that AAVs were in the water.
3. As the primary control officer, you ultimately bear responsibility to ensure positive control and leadership oversight over waterborne AAV operations and you failed to do so. Accordingly, you are hereby censured.
4. A copy of this letter will be placed in your official service record per reference (c). You may forward within 15 days of receipt of this letter a rebuttal consistent with reference (c), for inclusion in your official record, if you so desire.

Carlos Del Toro